

BROTHER JOE: NAME DROPPING AND MAN PRAISING

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The following is by Pastor Buddy Smith of Malenda, Queensland, Australia
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Brother Joe was one of a kind. He only ever pastored one church. It was the church he started when he moved to a town near us in 1939. He never received a salary from his church. He said he would simply trust God for his needs to be met, and he did, and they were. He never asked for anything, but God heard his prayers and blessed his faith, and he never did without. He taught all the way through the Bible at least three times in a pastorate that lasted more than fifty years. He preached on the radio everyday for all those years and wrote a book that is a classic on raising children. He sent all his children to Bible college, and his son Tim now pastors the church his dad started almost 70 years ago.

One thing about Bro. Joe that puzzled me was the way he would quote preachers or commentators without telling us their names. He would say something like this, "A dear brother in the Lord once wrote..." or he would say, "A godly old commentator once observed this about our text..." I can't ever remember him telling us who he was quoting. Later on, as I became a bit more familiar with writers and preachers I would stumble across the quotes he used and wonder why he never told us who said them. They were not heretics, nor were they involved in entangling and compromising alliances. They were men like Harry Ironside or A.W. Tozer or Harry Rimmer. But he never told us who he was quoting. Oh, he made it clear that the quotes were not his. He was never guilty of plagiarising. He just didn't tell us who he quoted.

It was through his wise and discreet use of truth that I learned an important lesson on worship. Bro. Joe avoided name dropping because he sincerely desired for God and God alone to have all the glory. He very carefully and wisely used the truths that fell from the lips and pens of godly men, and he did so in ways that directed the worship of his hearers away from those men and toward God. As the years passed I heard of God's blessings on Bro. Joe's ministry, of the people who loved him and asked him to preach in their Bible conferences and churches and colleges, but it wasn't Bro. Joe who told me about it. He simply had no desire for the praise of men. Certainly, we should thank God for those He uses, and thank them in person, but the crowns can wait till the judgment seat.

The apostle Peter speaks of the wisdom God gave to his dearly beloved brother Paul, so it is obvious that it is not inherently wrong to name preachers that we quote, but Peter avoids heaping upon Paul the lavish praise we hear so often given to mere mortals (2 Peter 3:15-16). Bro. Joe simply desired that men should praise God and Him alone.

Giving praise to men is a very subtle form of hero worship. God has spoken ever so clearly on the subject of who is worthy to be worshipped. We all swim in a sea of pagan, materialistic, hedonistic, sensual, and rationalistic culture. Our culture genders in us visual, auditory, and

olfactory failures. We do not see that we are worshipping idols. We do not hear the warnings of God's Words, and we are totally unaware that swimming in our culture leaves us smelling like dead fish. Every culture thrives on the praise of men. Name dropping is the name of the game, in the world and in the church. "Dr. Flutesnoot said this," and, "Rabbi(t) Warren said that," and "The gospel according to Jack is this..." I attended a conference some time ago in which the main speaker could hardly finish a sentence without dropping the name of some well known Christian leader who is his friend, or dropping the name of some famous church or college he had preached in. I got the impression that we were all expected to say, "Oh! Do you know him?" and "Wow!, did you get to preach there?" We just love to drop names, don't we?

Why do we do this? Do we really believe that the gospel of Christ is enhanced by someone who has attained to celebrity status in our stagnant little cultural puddle? Does God need the endorsement of a megachurch guru or a supersalesman soulwinner? Will it count for eternity and for the glory of God that you or I were feted by the ringmaster of the religious circus that he calls a church? Or that you had a 30 second revival meeting with the pastor who jumped a Sunday School bus over a dozen tricycles? All our glorying in man is idolatrous and an abomination in the sight of God. It doesn't really matter whose signature is at the bottom of your Bible college diploma. It doesn't really matter whose endorsement is on the back of your book. What has eternal value is whether we have gathered up all the glory and praise we can find and given every bit of it to God.

Consider a few of the Scriptures that speak of the worship of God,

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

"I am the LORD, that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

"For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11).

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1).

One last thought: whether we realise it or not, our praise of man tends to have a hidden agenda. We tend to praise men so that they will praise us back. There is in every one of us enough Devil to crave the praise of men. And so we give it to get it. We need to read John 5:44, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Our craving for recognition, for praise, for honour and glory, according to our Saviour, is an impediment to faith. "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another.....?"

One of my favourite evangelists lived to the ripe old age of 87 years. He preached for over 70 years and is sometimes described as the "best loved evangelist of all time." When he was very old it was decided by his friends that he should be honoured publicly. Many were invited to come and give testimonials as to his usefulness in the Lord's work, and they came in droves. One

speaker after another sang the praises of the old preacher until finally the speeches were done, and the moderator turned to invite the aged preacher to the lectern to receive the award. To everyone's surprise he was nowhere to be found. The guest of honour was not on the platform, or even in the building. He had absented himself some time during the meeting. He had chosen to turn a deaf ear to the sweet words from his admirers! They searched high and low, and eventually they found him, outside the great hall, in the street, speaking to a cabbie about his soul. He knew all about the priorities of godliness and he knew about the emptiness of the praises of men.

Only God is worthy of worship!

Someone may ask, "Who was Bro. Joe?"

I don't think he would want me to tell you.

We could be guilty of stealing from God the glory that belongs only to Him.

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